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AUTHOR Toole, Amy L.
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ABSTRACT

One of 10 documents developed by the Preschool Program of the Putnam/Northern Westchester (NY) Board of Cooperative Educational Services, the document is a summary of a June, 1981, institute on the efficacy of early childhood education for the handicapped. The institute was intended to provide state legislators, county executives, education department officials, and directors of special education with information relevant to legislative or educational decisions regarding young handicapped children. Section 1 provides an historical perspective to the development of early education programs and the results of national research to date. Section 2 provides a summary of the results of research conducted by the program on the effects of early intervention. Section 3 summarizes the history and status of legislative efforts in New York state and examines current funding to these programs through the Family Court Act. The last section gives recommendations made by the program at the institute. Major recommendations include authorizing services for all handicaps as defined in state law, authorizing services from birth to age five, and authorizing full state funding for these services. (DB)

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PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

A Regional Program for Preschool Handicapped Children

THE EFFICACY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR THE HANDICAPPED

Summary of Institute Proceedings

Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES
Yorktown Heights, New York 10598

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THE EFFICACY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR THE HANDICAPPED

Summary of Institute Proceedings

Prepared by:

Amy L. Toole
Project Director
A Regional Demonstration Program
for Preschool Handicapped Children
Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES
Yorktown Heights, New York 10598
(914) 962-2377

EC

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INSTITUTE STAFF

Dr. John J. Battles	District Superintendent Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES
Dr. Paul Irvine	Director of Special Education Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES
Ms. Amy Toole	Preschool Project Director Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES
Ms. Sue Koen	Evaluation Consultant Center for Resource Management Yorktown Heights, New York
Ms. Kathleen Petisi	Preschool Training Coordinator Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES

INTRODUCTION

This document is the result of an Institute held on June 5, 1981, regarding the Efficacy of Early Childhood Education for the Handicapped. The Institute was held by the Regional Demonstration Program (RDP) for Preschool Handicapped Children, operated by the Putnam/Northern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services in Yorktown Heights, New York. It was one of many activities which took place because of a three-year demonstration grant sponsored by the United States Department of Education.

Five participants were invited to attend. They represented State Senators and Assemblypersons whose constitutents are served through the RDP as well as county executives for each of the two counties which the RDP serves.

The specific purpose of the Institute was to provide documentation for the importance of education for preschool handicapped children. Speakers addressed the results of nationwide research regarding the effectiveness and cost efficiency of early education for the handicapped and described ways in which preschool special education could be incorporated into present educational systems. Special emphasis was placed on the results of research conducted over a two-year period by the RDP program. Participants were provided with a statement of present needs and recommendations for programming and legislation in New York State.

This proceedings summary is addressed to state legislators, county executives, education department officials and directors of special education. Its

purpose is to provide information regarding the efficacy of early childhood education for the handicapped to those individuals who may need such data to make legislative or educational decisions regarding young handicapped children.

The document is dividied into four sections:

Section 1 provides a historical perspective to the development of early education programs and the results of national research to date;

Section 2 provides a summary of the results of research, conducted by the RDP program, on the effects of early intervention;

Section 3 provides a summary of the history and status of legislative efforts in New York State and examines current funding of these programs through the Family Court Act;

Section 4 provides recommendations made by the RDP program at this Institute.

The Regional Demonstration Program hopes this document will provide the reader with a basic understanding of the results of research and programming efforts in the field of early childhood education for the handicapped. Hopefully, it will also clarify the reasons for insuring that such programs for handicapped preschoolers continue in New York State.

The RDP would like to extend its appreciation to Institute participants and acknowledge their interest in the needs of handicapped children.

* * * * * * * * *

SECTION 1

The Effectiveness of Early Childhood Education for the Handicapped *

A National Perspective

Special education was almost nonexistent before this century, except for the efforts of a few individuals who worked on their own for the benefit of handicapped children. In earlier times, as soon as a child was known to have some significant learning difficulty, he or she frequently was sent to a state school -- a place away from home -- to live a life of dependence and nonproductivity. As late as the 1940s and '50s, the majority of children who received special education in this country were those whose parents had the money and the expertise needed to find the few private training centers where their children could be enrolled. During the 1950s and early '60s, there was an expansion of federal support for the handicapped in the areas of research, teacher training, and demonstration. But for most handicapped youngsters, including the poor and those without influence, little direct help was available.

In the 1960s, efforts like Head Start and the Compensatory Education programs were initiated to "make up" for those educational deficits that seemed to go with economic inequality. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act firmly established the idea of federal aid to education. In the months and years that followed, amendments were added to this law to help meet the educational needs of special children. These amendments provided additional funds for state schools and for local service centers. They supported research and experimental efforts.

* This material was excerpted from Starting at the Beginning. (TADS and WESTAR, 1980).

During this period, many educators and researchers began to encourage the earliest possible provision of services for children with special needs. Support for special services came from Benjamin Bloom, Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget, and others who impressed the professional world with the contention that much of the intellectual growth of the human being takes place during the first four to six years of life. They and others also suggested that many of the critical emotional, linguistic and cognitive patterns in human beings are set by the age of three years.

In response to the need for stimulating more and better preschool special services, Congress passed Public Law 90-538 in 1968. This landmark legislation came to be known as the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act. One of its greatest contributions was to give the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped in the U. S. Office of Education authorization to begin funding demonstration projects in all parts of the country. These projects were not expected to meet all the needs for preschool special education. But they were intended to develop ways of serving special children and their families and then demonstrate their methods to state and local agencies which would ultimately be responsible for providing services within their own geographic areas. After three years of federal funding, the financial backing of the projects was to be assumed by public and/or private sources. This plan -- involving federal, state, and local people -- has worked well to date. A great deal of the progress in preschool special education over the past ten years can be traced directly to the projects begun under the 1968 legislation.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of all the special education laws is Public Law 94-142, the Education For All Handicapped Children Act. Its purpose is to make a free, appropriate public education available to all handicapped children.

In fact, this law requires every school system receiving federal funds to provide free and appropriate services to all handicapped children, aged three to twenty-one, in their areas. It includes a provision to make additional funds available to the states to help pay the extra cost of these services. However, services to preschoolers are mandated only if the federal requirement does not conflict with any state law, practice, or an order of any court.

There are indications that dollars spent on preschool special education today will save us dollars that might have been spent on special education later. Research by David Weikart at the High/Scope Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan and Irving Lazar of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York shows that a substantial portion of the total costs of an early childhood program can be recovered from the savings which result because participating students often require less costly forms of education later. Weikart shows that handicapped children with preschool services get off to a better start than they would have without them. The children never completely lose this initial advantage. Weikart also found that a group of eighth graders who had preschool ranked higher in academic achievement than their peers who had not had preschool.

What these and other studies suggest is that when a handicapped student can enter a <u>regular</u> classroom situation and do well enough to stay -- educational costs decrease for that child. Research also suggests that preschool may lower a special child's involvement with welfare, medical and penal systems which in turn saves tax dollars. Preschool special services also appear to increase the potential for the lifetime earnings of an individual. In dollars and cents, the value of early childhood intervention cannot be denied. In fact, research and experience support the contention that the earlier an educational program is begun with the young child, the more effective it is likely to be.

But the savings of dollars and cents are the least compelling reasons for providing these necessary services. Providing services at an early age facilitates optimal growth and development, the attainment of individual potential, and independence. In fact, there is a growing amount of evidence which indicates that the earlier a child's handicapping condition is identified, the more successful the educational intervention.

There is no single best recipe for a program for young handicapped children. Across the country, programs have taken many diverse forms. Some programs base their activities in a center which children and their parents attend for developmental activities. Other programs send their workers into home settings for regular visits, usually with emphasis on helping parents teach their children. Various combinations of "home-based" and "center-based" programs are used, depending on the locations of programs and on the individual needs of the children to be served.

Regardless of the arrangement chosen to deliver the special services, five essential characteristics have shown up repeatedly in the programs that have helped preschoolers with special needs. First of all, parents are involved extensively in the design and implementation of their children's developmental programs. Second, the training of parents and of project workers is organized, extensive, and continuous. Third, a sound theoretical base which gives the program a consistent structure exists. Fourth, the program's philosophy and goals are clearly stated. Fifth, what the project intends to accomplish with each child and the milestones each child is expected to achieve are spelled out carefully and clearly.

SECTION 2

Results of Local Program Evaluation

During the last two years, the Center for Resource Management, Inc. (Yorktown Heights, New York) conducted an evaluation of the Regional Demonstration Program. The evaluation examined processes and outcomes associated with the classroom program and the home program (see Appendix A).

The following results indicate the success of the classroom program during the 1979-1980 school year:

* As compared to national norms, RDP students made statistically significant gains from pre- to post-test in all skill areas measured by the McCarthy Scales. These areas included:
  - Verbal Ability
  - Perceptual-Performance
  - Quantitative Ability
  - Motor Performance
  - Memory
  - General Cognitive Ability
* Placement records were extremely positive; 65 percent of RDP graduates were placed in regular classrooms or transition programs while only 35 percent were assigned to special education programs.
* Follow-up testing with RDP graduates revealed that the cognitive skill gains made during the 1978-79 school year were maintained by those students who continued to have special intervention services.

Achievement of objectives for home-program students at the end of the school year was consistently above the standard initially set. Ninety percent of the goals the program staff set for improving the functioning of their students were met in the three years of the project.

Effectiveness Factors

Recent research has placed emphasis on several specific factors that may be considered evidence of the effectiveness of early intervention for the handicapped. The four most significant factors are:

1. Number of preschool graduates placed in regular education
2. Few preschool graduates retained in regular grades
3. Positive parental perceptions of the educational program's impact on the children
4. Positive attitudes of the children toward school

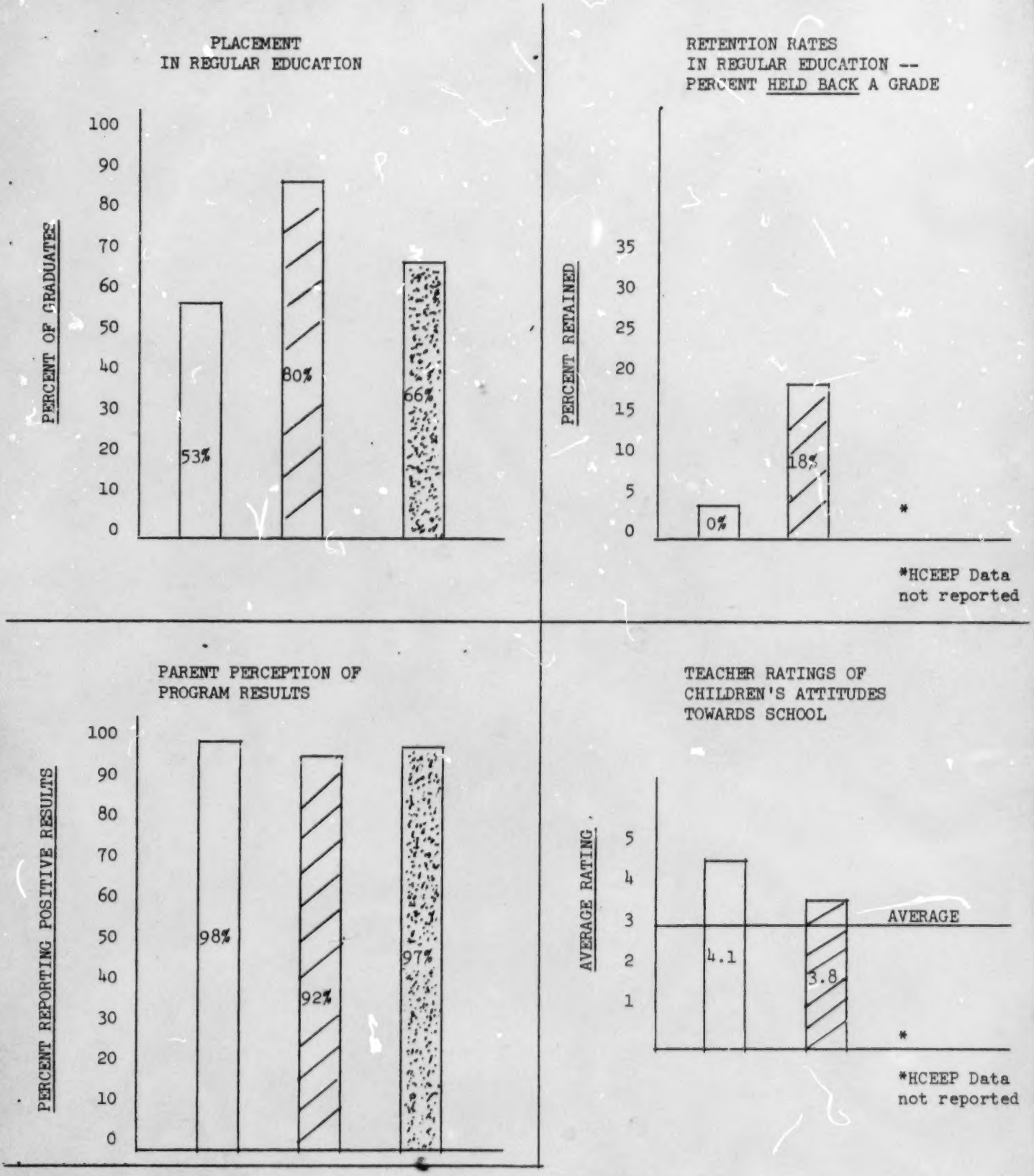
The last factor is also a significant predictor of later school success.

To provide further evidence of effectiveness, a study which examined the four factors listed above was conducted to assess the long-range impact of the RDP. Children who graduated from the preschool program between January 1976 and May 1980 were considered in the sample. The major results revealed:

* Fifty-three percent of the total graduate sample are currently placed in regular education programs; none of these students have been held back a grade which indicates the cost-benefits of preschool education.
* Parents of graduates in regular and special education reported positive results for their children; 98 percent of the parents indicated that their child would not have done as well in school if he/she had not participated in the RDP.

* Teachers rated the RDP graduates in regular classrooms similar to or slightly better than their peers in both skills and attitudes towards school, which demonstrates the value of the program in improving the performance of the students academically and socially.

The charts on the following page give the results of recent studies of students from three programs (including the RDP) -- serving children with a wide range of handicapping conditions -- with regard to these indicators. These results clearly suggest that preschool programs have a positive impact on the handicapped children they serve.



A Regional Demonstration Program for Preschool Handicapped Children (Toole, 1981)

Joint Early Education for the Preschool Handicapped (JEEPH) (Karnes, 1980)

Handicapped Children Early Education Programs (HCEEP) (Battelle Institute, 1976)

SECTION 3

The Status of Legislation In New York State

During the past decade, approximately seventy bills were introduced into either the Senate or the Assembly (or both) in New York State regarding pre-school education for the handicapped. In fact, every year during the past decade, legislation has been introduced. The majority of bills emphasized lowering the mandated age of children to be served through the local school district down to age three. To date, four bills have passed, either in one house or the other. Two passed in the senate, one in 1974 and one in 1979; and two in the Assembly, one in 1972 and one in 1976. Each passed their houses unanimously. None of these proposals passed both houses.

In 1980-81, the Governor's Executive Budget also proposed that school districts assume responsibility for handicapped children who are between the ages of three and five years. However, financing would have been shared by the state and the school district using a state-aid formula. No provision was made for children under three in that bill.

In the past two years, the Board of Regents has proposed that responsibility for providing educationally related services and transportation be shifted to school districts. This proposal includes a provision for full state funding of programs for handicapped children between the ages of three and five who are placed in special education. Services for children under three years old would still be available through the Family Court Act. This bill is presently being recommended by the Board of Regents.

The New York State Council on Children and Families has introduced a bill recommending that a service system devoted to early intervention should draw upon the resources and administrative structures already established within the State Education Department (SED), the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Health, and other service and regulatory systems. Under this plan SED would continue to have primary responsibility for providing educational or educational and habilitation services to disabled children, ages three to five years. The Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities would be responsible for funding habilitation and medical services for children under three years. They would also ensure the delivery of services to those disabled children, ages three to five years, who were solely in need of habilitation or medical services through generic health and specialized developmental disabilities providers. This bill and the Regents Bill are presently available for consideration by the Legislature. Many programs are presently funded through the Family Court. It is important that this legislation be considered since Family Court funding is considered inappropriate by most professionals and parents.

Family Court

Under the Family Court Act, families with a handicapped child under age five must petition the Court under Section 236 of the Family Court Act, to obtain needed services. The petition must be supported by evidence of the need for services which is supplied by a psychiatrist or a psychologist and a physician. If the judge approves the court order, the cost of the program is paid by the county. The State Education Department reimburses the county or city for fifty percent of the service costs. The State

Education Department also issues prior approval of each petition regarding eligibility for state funding. Children with a variety of handicapping conditions are eligible for services under the current system. These conditions are specified in the education law and include emotional, mental, and physical problems: e.g. mental retardation; autism; cerebral palsy; orthopedic conditions; and emotional disturbances. Services provided via the Family Court system of funding are delivered through programs such as a BOCES and other public schools, and voluntary agencies such as the United Cerebral Palsy, the Association for Retarded Citizens, Head Start programs, and day care centers.

There have been problems, however, that have been cited in regard to this method of funding. The most difficult aspect of the current delivery system is that parents are required to petition the Family Court in order to obtain services for their handicapped child. The trauma of raising a child with a handicapping condition is increased by requiring parents to petition the Court. In some counties, parents have to appear in the Court physically to defend the need for services that have already been recommended by professionals in the field. To compound the situation further, the petitioning process varies dramatically from county to county. Also, parents are frustrated when the services are unavailable, or only available at a great distance from their homes, or when they experience lengthy delays in the petitioning process.

Another problem has been the growth and cost for local government. Early intervention programs were developed mostly through federal funding, but no permanent state funding source exists except through the Family Court. The counties have, therefore, been forced to insure continuation

of funding. County officials have been very concerned about the open-ended drain on their resources that the Family Court program has brought.

There is also a lack of coordination. Programs funded through the Court program are largely uncoordinated and are not integrated with many other services provided for young children. Services for school-age children, on the other hand, are channelled through the local school district's Committee on the Handicapped. New and existing programs also experience difficulty in operating since state and town funds are often delayed because of the number of agencies and departments involved in processing each child's individual petition. Moreover, the process is unevenly applied throughout the state. In some counties, services are provided in an expeditious way and in other counties, they are not. Most of the people involved in dealing with Family Court petitioning agree that this is not the most appropriate or viable means of attaining educational funding for these children. Nonetheless, it is, at present, the only source of legislated funding for educational services.

SECTION 4

Recommendations for Future Legislation

New legislation is needed to serve the best interests of handicapped children and to insure appropriate and adequate services in New York State. After all, research and experience indicate that intervention is most effective when provided earlier in a child's life than school age. At least three essential elements need to be included in such legislation if it is indeed going to provide a comprehensive statewide system that will make services available to all those young children who need them:

1. Legislation should authorize services for <u>all handicaps</u> as defined in our state law and the regulations of the commissioner. Not only should this legislation include severely handicapped children, who have been the subject of some proposals in the past, but it should also include services for moderately and mildly handicapped children. The RDP research has clearly demonstrated the positive impact of programming for these children. (see Appendix A)
2. Legislation should include authorization of services for the full range of preschool years, that is, from <u>birth to age five</u>. It is clear from the previous research in the field that the earlier the handicapped child can be served, the better the results. (see Appendix B)
3. There should be authorization for <u>full state funding</u> for these services. At present, the Family Court system is a

burden on the counties. That burden was unanticipated a few years ago. Suddenly, the counties are being asked to underwrite half the cost of expensive services for large numbers of children.

The passing of appropriate legislation will insure appropriate services to young handicapped children by reducing local financial responsibility and simplifying the eligibility process. It is legislation that's needed now!

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BOARD OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
Putnam/Northern Westchester Education Center
Yorktown Heights, New York 10598

A REGIONAL DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM FOR PRESCHOOL HANDICAPPED CHILDREN FACT SHEET SPRING 1981

Public Law 94-142, the federal "Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975" states a national priority for a free, appropriate public education for handicapped children, ages 3 through 21. Under New York State law, preschool programs for handicapped children below the age of five may not be funded by local school districts. Tuition for preschool programs for the handicapped may be provided under Article 89, Chapter 853, Section 4406, of the Education Law in cooperation with Section 236 of the Family Court Act. Aside from federal funding, the Family Court system is the only system in New York State which allows services to be provided.

DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING BOCES PUTNAM/NORTHERN WESTCHESTER PRESCHOOL PROGRAM:

Between 100 and 150 children are served by providing early intervention services for children from birth to five years of age. Children exhibit one or more handicapping conditions. These handicaps include: severely speech/language impaired; emotionally handicapped; physically handicapped; specific learning disability; hard of hearing/deaf; blind/partially sighted; educable mentally retarded; trainable mentally retarded and autistic. The Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES provides services to 18 component school districts. This regional program constitutes an efficient method for our school districts to respond to the needs of preschool handicapped children. All component districts are eligible to receive services for any child who meets the program's selection criteria.

The current program has several specific components: SEARCH, SCREENING, ASSESSMENT, SERVICE and PARENT INVOLVEMENT. A brief description of each follows:

SEARCH - Presentations and advertising within the community create an awareness of program services. Direct referrals are accepted from parents, school district personnel, social agencies, medical institutions, public health nurses, physicians and nursery school teachers.

SCREENING - The preschool staff conduct a parent interview and observe the child's skills and behavior. Over 150 children and families receive this service annually.

ASSESSMENT - Team members work cooperatively to assess each child's needs and abilities and to develop an individualized prescriptive plan for the child and family.

DIRECT INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICE - A child and family may participate in one of two service delivery components based on needs: the classroom or home training program.

The Classroom Program - Children, ages three and four, are taught at sites in Peekskill, Mahopac and Yorktown Heights. A morning and afternoon session are offered with approximately 10 children in each session. Children spend 2½ hours per day, 5 days per week over a 10 month period in classrooms. Staffing includes a teacher-teacher aide team, parent volunteers and part-time speech and language pathologists, psychologists and social workers. All staff are highly qualified in their respective disciplines; classroom teachers are trained in both early childhood and special education. The structured, routine schedule emphasizes individualized instruction during large and small group activities and during individual time. The daily schedule includes structured play, creative play, art, snack, quiet time and fine and gross motor activities.

The Home Training Program - Children from birth participate in the home program. This program is a replication of the Portage Project Model, a nationally validated program.

Skilled home training staff members each serve approximately 10 children and their parents through weekly visits in the natural home environment. An important advantage of the home training program is that the parent learns more effective parenting and teaching skills. The home program allows for the child to receive supplemental instruction at a regular nursery school, where appropriate.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT - Parents are viewed as team members who provide critical input in the overall educational planning for their children. Parent involvement is a major component of both the classroom and home training programs. Activities include parent orientation, formal and informal meetings with the staff, monthly group meetings, observations and volunteering in the classroom.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PUTNAM/NORTHERN WESTCHESTER BOCES PRESCHOOL PROGRAM:

The Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES Preschool Program has been nationally recognized as an effective intervention program. The nationally validated Portage Project operated by Cooperative Educational Service Agency 12 at Portage, Wisconsin, trained the staff and wrote in their evaluation of the program, "It is rare to see a preschool program that is as large as yours doing such a thorough job of planning and individualizing, yet keep such a high level of quality in its service."

The program further received national approval and recognition in the preschool field through the receipt of a United States Office of Education Demonstration Grant from 1978-1981. These funds allow the program to aid other preschool programs for the handicapped by demonstrating and disseminating exemplary programming, methods and curriculum.

A third party assessment of the project's unique approach to the early education of the handicapped was conducted during the 1979-80 school year by the Center for Resource Management, Yorktown Heights, New York. Results indicated that all the elements necessary to initiate the program and insure its effective daily operation were evident. Parents held extremely positive views and supported the program through a variety of involvement activities. Over 50% of the parents volunteered in classrooms; moreover, the average parent attended at least nine group parent meetings during a typical school year; 99% of the parents responded that they would recommend the program to the parents of other handicapped children.

As compared to national norms on the McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities, a widely known standardized test, students made educationally significant gains from pre- to post-test in verbal, perceptual-performance, motor and overall cognitive functioning, areas which are directly relevant to the stated program goals and daily curriculum activities.

Placement records were extremely positive; 65% of program graduates were placed in regular classrooms or transition programs while only 35% were assigned to special education programs. Follow-up testing with program graduates revealed that the skill gains made during the 1979-80 school year were maintained by those students who continued to have special intervention services. Additionally, an extensive follow-up study undertaken in the spring of 1981 revealed that preschool education had a positive effect on program graduates for factors such as regular school placement, retention, special services and teacher and parent ratings.

Community agencies have noted the effectiveness of the program with children they have referred; letters of commendation have been received from Protective Services, Day Care, Head Start and local nursery schools.

PROGRAM COSTS: The per pupil cost for 1981-82 for the program is $5,681.

For further information, contact: Ms. Amy L. Toole, BOCES Preschool Program, French Hill Elem. School, Baldwin Road, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598 (914) 962-2377

Position Statement on
SERVICES TO HANDICAPPED CHILDREN BIRTH THROUGH FIVE

Division Of Early Childhood
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
Reston, Virginia

The Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children believes that the provision of services to handicapped children from birth through five years of age must be made a priority of the 1980's. It is the premise of this division that lack of such services represents the most serious impediment to the development of handicapped children which exists today. There is mounting evidence of the effectiveness of programs for very young handicapped children and their families.*

Services to young handicapped children are currently provided by a variety of systems at national, state and local levels, including public health, social services, education, mental health and specific programs such as Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment Program (EPSDT), Head Start and Child Health Assurance Program (CHAP). There is little systematic coordination between these agencies, and major service gaps remain unfilled. We recommend that a national initiative be made to establish plans for systematic coordination between the social, educational and health agencies currently serving handicapped child birth through five so as to insure maximum benefits for these children and their families, and so as to plan for the future provision of additional programs to fill major gaps in service to this population. We urge the Council for Exceptional Children and the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped** to assume leadership roles in bringing about such a national planning effort.

The Division for Early Childhood recognizes that wide variations in service arrangements are necessary to meet the individual needs of children. We strongly support the principle that services for young and handicapped children, whenever appropriate, be provided in a context which includes nonhandicapped and handicapped children alike. Since the success of integrated programs relies heavily on the provision of specialized teacher training and supportive resources, we urge that the importance of such supports be reflected in legislative and funding directives.

In expanding services for handicapped children from birth through five years, it is essential that the central role of the parent in the young child's development be recognized. The parental role mandated under P.L. 94-142 does not adequately reflect the need for continuous active participation by parents and to provide support for families in their role as the child's primary care provider. The training of teachers of young handicapped children should be expanded to include skills in working with parents in mutually helpful ways so that parental and agency efforts in helping the child are strengthened.

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* For a review of this evidence, see the position paper prepared by INTER-ACT. Contact: Jennie E. Swanson, Ed.D., INTER-ACT, The National Committee for Services to Very Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families, Rte. 1, Box 96C, Barrington, IL 60010.

** Department of Education reorganization title, OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION.

Approved 4/22/80